

## *The Second Sunday after Pentecost*

*7<sup>th</sup> June 2026*

*The Holy Gospel: Matthew 9.9-13, 18-26*

**DIOCESAN SERMON** written by Reverend Canon Helen Ferguson PSM:

Today's Gospel reading has us hearing three of the stories from Matthew's Gospel that emphasise the miracles of Jesus, firstly in changing a hated man's greed, and secondly, the miracle of healing – not once but twice.

Historically, it's not really clear if the author of Matthew's Gospel is the same Matthew (also known as Levi) who is the despised tax collector we hear of today. But never-the-less, records show the gospel was written for a community of Jewish Christians trying to understand who Jesus was and what kind of kingdom he promised.

In the first scene, we hear of Jesus calling Matthew, the tax collector, to "follow him" and we note other tax collectors and sinners joined them in a meal. In the first century, tax collectors were deeply disliked as they worked with the Roman occupiers and were often associated with dishonesty and greed. For any religious teacher to sit and eat with tax collectors and sinners was shocking to "respectable" community members. Eating a meal together usually meant acceptance and belonging and this community could hardly believe Jesus would spend time with people their society rejected.

When the Pharisees objected, Jesus answered with the words: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." At the time of writing, this would have reminded Matthew's audience that God's covenant was never simply about outward religious observance. Holiness was not achieved by separation from sinners but by reflecting God's compassion to them. Jesus presents himself as the physician who comes for the sick, and he emphasises the kingdom of heaven is opened precisely to those who know their need of God's grace.

The second section continues with the miracles of healing. We hear of a synagogue leader come running in to ask Jesus to save his daughter who has just died. We readers can easily imagine his anguish, and like the scoffers outside when Jesus dismissed them saying the little girl was merely sleeping, we can only imagine their joy and surprise when Jesus brought her outside, alive and well.

Women the world over can certainly identify with the plight of the woman suffering from bleeding for many, many years, yet she had the faith to touch Jesus' cloak, knowing her faith would heal her. She didn't need Jesus to

actually touch her! Both these situations involved ritual impurity according to Jewish law. Contact with blood and with a corpse normally made a person unclean. Instead of becoming defiled, the practical Jesus brings healing and life. The woman is restored to dignity after years of isolation, and the girl is raised from death itself.

For Matthew's first readers, these stories ensured that in Jesus, God was doing something radically new. Barriers of purity, shame, and exclusion were being overcome and that faith in Christ brought restoration into the community of God's people.

Faith is the thread that runs through both of these Gospel stories. Tax collector Matthew leaves behind his old life because he trusts the call of Jesus, even before fully understanding where that call will lead. The woman reaches out to touch Jesus' cloak because she believes that his power can heal her when all else has failed. The synagogue leader kneels before Jesus in faith that even death is not beyond his authority. In each case, there is a faith-based trust placed in Christ. For us today, faith remains essential because it opens our hearts to God's grace, it transforms our lives, and it gives us courage to follow Christ in hope and obedience.

Yes, these passages are challenging. Yet, they remind the Church that it exists not as a society of the perfect, but as a fellowship of grace. The Church is called to welcome those who feel excluded, wounded, or spiritually unworthy, and whilst our worship, our sacraments, and our traditions are important, we must remember, they must always serve the greater calling of love and mercy.

Like the woman who reached out in hope, many people today carry hidden suffering. And like Matthew, many feel judged by society, yet Christ still calls people to follow him before they have everything in order. There is no need to wait until you're perfect (that may never happen), but it will be an easier road to travel when we get onto it to follow God's desires for each and every one of us. He knows us better than we know ourselves so now is the time to be with him in body, mind and spirit.

AMEN